'JFK' Premiere: Nothing Covert

The Scene: The benefit world premiere of Warner Bros.' "JFK" Tuesday at the Mann Village Theater in Westwood. This might be the first big-budget agit-prop movie ever released by a major studio. It's basically director Oliver Stone vs. the Warren Commission, the FBI, the CIA and military intelligence. "I think the Warren Commission report has more fiction in it than this movie does," said Stone.

The Locale: A huge white tent was set on the second floor of a parking garage near the theater. It was decorated with chandeliers, red brocade drapes, lace tablecloths and massive arrangements of mums, gladioluses and roses to give an impression of early 1960s New Orleans and Washington. "Someone said we ended up with Memphis," said designer J. Ben Bourgeois.

Who Was There: The film's stars, Kevin Costner, Tommy Lee Jones, Donald Sutherland and Sissy Spacek, director Oliver Stone and 1,500 guests including Sean Penn, Michael Douglas, Aidan Quinn, Kiefer Sutherland, Ice Cube, Gunnar and Matthew Nelson, Mike Ovitz and members of the Red Hot Chili Peppers, who smuggled one of L.A.'s more ambitious party crashers into the tent as a band member.

The Buzz: Comment ranged from "devastating" to "good movie, bad history" to "this is a paranoid's delight." Most agreed it would stir things up a bit. "The CIA and FBI are going to need a new PR company," said one publicist.

Dress Mode: An amazing number of men wore what Costner did —blue jeans, cowboy boots and a sports jacket. Has this become an American uniform? Are we all going to look like wealthy Fresno cattlemen someday?

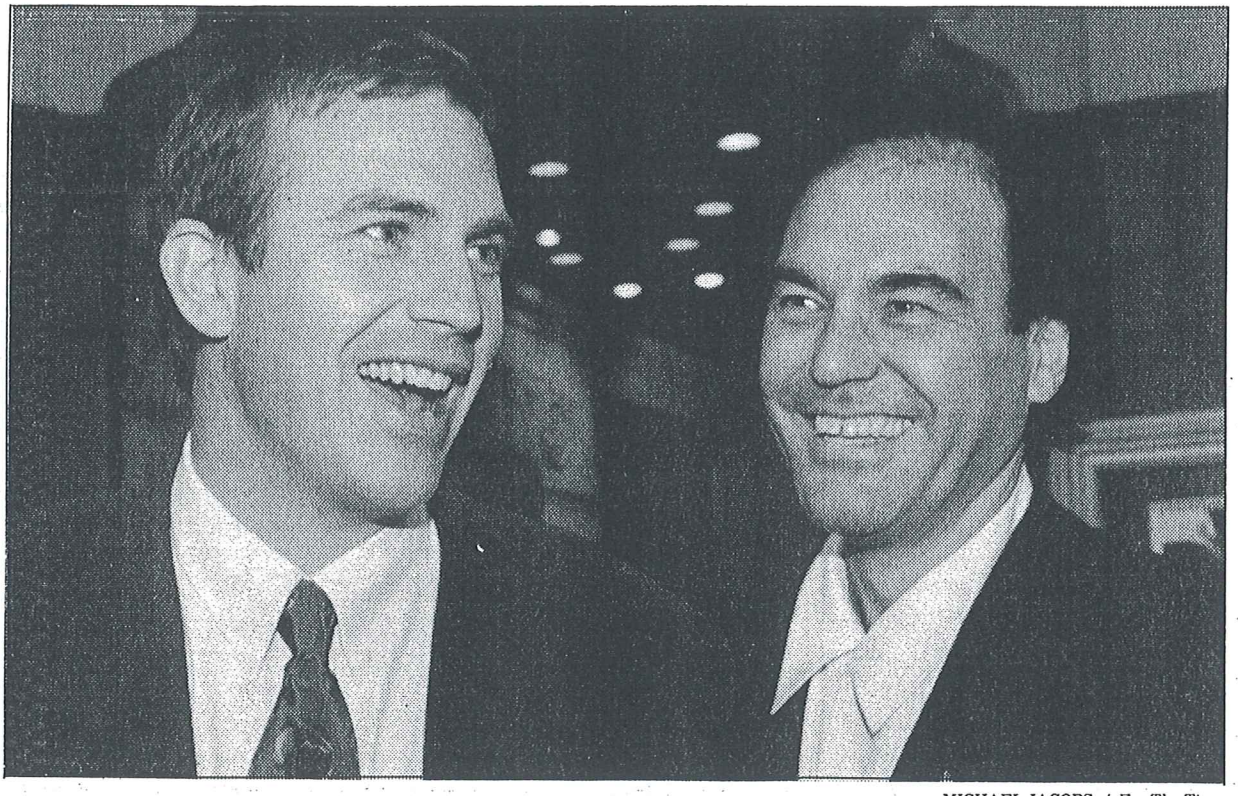
Money Matters: The event, underwritten by Warner Bros., netted $250,000 for Rock the Vote, a nonpartisan (though it felt a lot more Democrat nonpartisan, than Republican nonpartisan) record industry organization encouraging young people to register to vote. "We want to empower a generation that seems not to care," said co-founder Jeff Ayeroff.

Chow: Buffet tables lined the tent's walls. Along Came Mary served up pork tenderloin, Norwegian salmon, bluepoint oysters, pastas and homemade sausages in pre-holiday diet-busting proportions.

Quoted: "I think Kennedy was the godfather of my generation and his death was, in a sense, the end of the old liberalism," said Stone. "He was like an early Gorbachev. I think he could have ended the Cold War. I think he was cut down because of that."

Observed: Stone seemed satisfied with the crowd's response, but you got the feeling he wouldn't be completely happy until trench-coated CIA agents burst into the theater to assassinate the projectionist and confiscate the movie.

RSVP



MICHAEL JACOBS / For The Times

Kevin Costner, left, and director Oliver Stone. The film "is a good seminar on our history," says Costner.

INTO THE NIGHT / BILL HIGGINS